

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5587

INFO AMEMBASSY DACCA

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CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L NEW DELHI 6216

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFRO, IN, BG

SUBJ: INDO-BANGLADESH RELATIONS; FARAKKA; BORDER INCIDENTS
AND THE MAJORS

REF: NEW DELHI 5893

SUMMARY: THE ATTITUDE PROJECTED BY THE GOI'S BANGLADESH
EXPERT ON THE EVE OF THE FARAKKA TALKS WAS MODERATE, ALTHOUGH
CONCERN OVER THE RETURN OF THE MAJORS AND THE GROWING CONCERN
FOR THE MORE VOCAL ROLE PLAYED BY ISLAMIC ELEMENTS IN
BANGLADESH WAS APPARENT. THE GOI IS ANNOYED BY THE BANGLADESH
PRESS, BUT PROJECTS A TOLERANT POSITION ON THE BORDER
INCIDENTS. THE GOI SCENARIO ON FARAKKA INCLUDES TECHNICAL
TALKS TO BE CAPPED BY A HIGH LEVEL MEETING ON BILATERAL
RELATIONS IF THE BANGLADESHIS COOPERATE. THE GOI MESSAGE
IT SEEMS TO US IS THAT BILATERAL RELATIONS WITH
BANGLADESH ARE MANAGEABLE, IF TROUBLESOME, AND THE GOI
WILL BE TOLERANT SO LONG AS COMMUNALISM IS CONTAINED AND
THERE IS NO FLOW OF HINDU REFUGEES. WE HAVE NO CLEARER
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PICTURE OF RECENT BORDER DEVELOPMENTS. END SUMMARY.

1. IN THE COURSE OF SEPARATE COURTESY CALLS APRIL 27 ON MEA ADDITIONAL SECRETARY (BANGLADESH) AJMANI AND ACTING BANGLADESH DEPUTY HIGH COMMISSIONER AHMED, EMBOFFS AND VISITING BG DESK OFFICER-DESIGNATE ARCHARD GAINED FURTHER PERSPECTIVE ON SEVERAL SUBJECTS CURRENTLY TROUBLING INDO-BANGLADESH RELATIONS. AJMANI, NORMALLY A HARD-LINER ON BANGLADESH, TOOK MODERATE LINE IN DISCUSSION, WHILE AT SAME TIME EVINCING CONCERN ABOUT WHAT HE CHARACTERIZED AS A GROWING ISLAMIC INFLUENCE IN DACCA. HE SEEMED TO CONNECT THE RETURN OF THE EXILED MAJORS TO DACCA FROM LIBYA WITH THIS INFLUENCE.

2. AJMANI INITIATED CONVERSATION BY ASKING ARCHARD, WHO WAS RECENTLY IN DACCA, WHAT SIGNIFICANCE HE SAW IN THEIR RETURN AND THEN WENT ON TO SPECULATE AS TO POSSIBLE IMPACT THEY COULD HAVE THERE. HE SPECULATED THEIR RETURN COULD MEAN PRESSURES ON ZIA HAVE RISEN, THAT ISLAMIC ELEMENTS ARE GAINING STRENGTH, AND THAT INSTABILITY MAY INCREASE IN BANGLADESH. OVER PAST SIX WEEKS, AJMANI SAID, ISLAMIC ELEMENTS HAVE BECOME MORE VOCAL, ESPECIALLY MULANA BASHANI WHO WAS CALLED FOR A MARCH ON FARAKKA, AND MASS MEETINGS BY ISLAMIC ORGANIZATIONS.

3. AJMANI EXPRESSED CONSIDERABLE CONCERN OVER WHAT HE DESCRIBED AS HEAVY ANTI-INDIAN PRESS PLAY IN DACCA AND ADVERSE EFFECT THIS MIGHT HAVE ON POPULAR ATTITUDES. HE SAID INDIAN HIGH COMMISSION HAD RAISED THE PROBLEM WITH BDG (AS HE WOULD WHEN HE WAS IN DACCA THIS WEEK) BUT HAD GOTTEN NO SATISFACTORY RESPONSE.

4. BORDER INCIDENTS: AJMANI DREW A CONNECTION BETWEEN BASHANI'S AND OTHERS AGITATION AND RECENT BORDER INCIDENTS. ALTHOUGH NEVER SAYING IT EXPLICITLY, HE IMPLIED THAT APRIL 19 BORDER INCIDENTS OCCURRED WHEN LOCAL BG ELEMENTS (MISCREANTS AND OTHERWISE), STIRRED UP BY BASHANI, FIRED ON INDIAN UNITS. THE EVENTS OF APRIL 20TH, HIS IMPLICATION CONTINUED, WERE INDIAN RETALIATION FOR PREVIOUS DAY'S PROVOCATIONS. BG EMBOFF IN HIS OWN RECAP OF INCIDENTS LIKEWISE IMPLIED THAT APRIL 20 SHELLING WAS AN INDIAN RETALIATORY ACTION. CONFIDENTIAL

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AJMANI DID NOT RESPOND TO QUERY ABOUT APRIL 21 INCIDENTS. HE SAID THAT GOI WAS NOT SERIOUSLY CONCERNED OVER BORDER INCIDENTS. THE GOI KNEW BDG WAS NOT TRYING TO ATTACK INDIA AND SAID INDIA HAD NO INTEREST IN HURTING BANGLADESH. GOI WAS AWARE THAT BDG WAS CONTINUING EFFORTS TO PROTECT THE HINDU MINORITY.

5. FARAKKA TALKS: AJMANI, WHO LEFT HERE APRIL 27 TO

PARTICIPATE IN TECHNICAL LEVEL FARAKKA TALKS, OUTLINED COURSE HE EXPECTS TALKS TO FOLLOW (PROVIDED, HE FREQUENTLY REITERATED, THAT THE BANGLADESHIS COOPERATE BY PROVIDING THE REQUIRED DATA). FIRST, HIS DELEGATION WILL SPEND FOUR OR FIVE DAYS IN DACCA AND AFFECTED AREA GATHERING DATA AND HOLDING DISCUSSIONS. SECOND, (FOLLOWING BY A DAY OR TWO INDIAN DELEGATION'S RETURN) ARRIVAL IN WEST BENGAL OF BG GROUP TO LOOK AT FARAKKA AND HOOGHLY. THIRD, EXCHANGE OF LOWER LEVEL TECHNICIANS TO COLLECT ADDITIONAL DATA, AND FOURTH, ONLY IF ALL FOREGOING ARE SUCCESSFUL AND BANGLADESHIS COOPERATE, COULD HIGH LEVEL POLITICAL TALKS ON BILATERAL RELATIONS TAKE PLACE.

6. BDG HICOMMOFF CLAIMED SATISFACTION THAT TALKS ARE TO TAKE PLACE, ALBEIT TWO MONTHS LATER THAN THEY SHOULD HAVE. AHMED TOLD US THAT NO PRECONDITIONS WERE SET FOR TALKS SO THAT ENTIRE YEAR'S FLOW COULD BE DEALT WITH. HOWEVER, ACCORDING TO SOME PAPERS HERE, INTERALIA "INDIAN EXPRESS" APRIL 27, DISCUSSIONS WILL BE ON LEAN MONTHS FLOW ONLY.

7. COMMENT: OUR IMPRESSION IS THAT AJMANI WAS TRYING TO CONVEY THE MESSAGE THAT RELATIONS WITH BANGLADESH ARE MANAGEABLE. HE MADE IT CLEAR THEY WERE ALSO AWKWARD AND UNPREDICTABLE, BUT DEMONSTRATED INFINITELY MORE TOLERANCE TOWARD HIS CLIENTS THAN HE DID LAST AUGUST THROUGH NOVEMBER. NOW HE EMPHASIZES THAT INDIA CAN LIVE WITH EVEN A TROUBLESOME BANGLADESH GOVERNMENT, SO LONG AS THAT GOVERNMENT KEEPS DOMESTIC PEACE AND AVOIDS THE COMMUNALISM THAT WOULD SEND HINDU REFUGEES STREAMING INTO WEST BENGAL. WE CONTINUE TO HAVE NO CLEAR PICTURE OF WHAT HAS AHPPENED ALONG THE BORDER (REFTEL). WHATEVER THE GOI'S INTENTIONS ARE, IT IS CLEAR THAT AJMANI IS FOR THE PRESENT ATTEMPTING TO CONVEY A RELATIVELY RELAXED, BENIGN, AND RESIGNED
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